This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to several major themes relating to public opinion, voting behavior, and political participation – primarily, though not exclusively, in the United States. How much do ordinary citizens know about politics and government? How complete is their understanding of important issues, and to what extent do their preferences on those issues guide their voting choices? Why don’t more Americans participate in politics, either at the polls or in other ways? Do low participation rates mean that the United States (or any other country) is less “democratic” than its citizens would like to believe? Why have citizens become increasingly mistrustful of their governmental leaders and institutions? These are just a few of the questions that we will examine over the next few months.

Grades in this course will be based on the following:
- Midterm exam: 20 percent (Thursday, Oct 16, in class)
- Attendance and participation: 20 percent
- Periodic written assignments: 30 percent
- Final exam: 30 percent (Wednesday, Dec 17, 10:00 a.m.)

The nature and content of midterm and final exams will be discussed in class. No make-ups will be given except in the case of a fully documented medical or other emergency; anyone who fails to take either exam without such documentation will receive a score of zero. The attendance/participation component of your grade will be determined using three criteria: (a) daily attendance sign-in (I will provide the sheet of paper, but you are responsible for ensuring that your name is on it); (b) informed (showing familiarity with assigned readings) contributions to class discussions; and (c) an occasional pop quiz covering those readings (questions will be simple and answers obvious for anyone who has done the work).

The written assignments are based on topics identified by the course outline provided below. In each instance, students will find an Internet reading relevant to the topic and write a short (2-3 pages, double-spaced) essay briefly summarizing the content of that reading and relating it to themes covered in class. For the twelve topics listed, you should choose six on which to write essays (all of which will be graded for content and grammar and returned with comments). Don't lose track of where you stand because there will be no opportunities for extra credit at the end.

TWO NOTES: First, a hard copy of both your essay and the Internet article on which it is based should be handed in during class on the day the essay is due. Second, the main purpose of these assignments is for you to see how ideas discussed in class play out in the real world – so do not base your essay on an academic
source (journal article or book chapter) without first getting approval of the instructor. Material written by academics for a lay audience is acceptable, however.

Minus grades will (if appropriate) be assigned in this course. Information about grades and grading policies at UF can be found at http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html

Students are bound by the University of Florida's Student Code of Conduct. Anyone who commits an act of academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams or committing plagiarism on the written essays, will suffer appropriate sanctions and be referred to university authorities for further action.

Any student with a handicap or special need should notify me (and coordinate with Student Services at 202 Peabody Hall) as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. Every effort will be made to accommodate your situation within the guidelines set forth by the university.

A class listserv has been established so that I can send you occasional announcements and keep you informed about any changes that might occur in the schedule. You are automatically on the list by virtue of being enrolled in this course. You must, however, be sure either to check the email in your gatorlink account on a regular basis, or to forward all gatorlink messages to an account that you use more frequently.

COURSE OUTLINE

Aug 26: Introduction
Aug 28: No class

Week 1 (Sep 1-5): Measuring Public Opinion
Assigned Reading:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapters 1-4, 12.
David W. Moore, The Opinion Makers: An Insider Exposes the Truth behind the Polls (Beacon Press, 2008), Chapters 1, 4 (pp. 1-17, 58-80).

Week 2 (Sep 8-12): Voter Competence
Assigned Reading:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapter 6.
Internet essay #1 due Sep 9 (topic: polling)

Week 3 (Sep 15-19): Partisanship
Assigned Reading:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapter 7.
Internet essay #2 due Sep 16 (topic: voter knowledge/competence)

Week 4 (Sep 22-26): Ideology
Assigned Reading:
Bardes-Oldendick, review pp. 132-139 in Chapter 7.
John Sides, “Why Most Conservatives Are Secretly Liberals,” The Monkey Cage (3/6/14);
http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/06/why-most-conservatives-are-secretly-liberals/
Jack Kerwick, “Most ‘Conservatives’ Are Secretly Neoconservatives,” The New American (3/12/14);
http://www.thenewamerican.com/reviews/opinion/item/17828-most-conservatives-are-secretly-neoconservatives

Internet essay #3 due Sep 23 (topic: partisanship)

Week 5 (Sep 29-Oct 3): Social Groups
Assigned Reading:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapter 5.
Pew Research Center, “Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends (3/7/14); http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/
Pew Research Center, “The Gender Gap: Three Decades Old, as Wide as Ever” (3/29/12);

Internet essay #4 due Sep 30 (topic: ideology)

Week 6 (Oct 6-10) Voting Behavior
Assigned Reading:

Internet essay #5 due Oct 7 (topic: social group divisions in politics)

Week 7 (Oct 13-17): Midterm Review/Exam
Internet essay #6 due Oct 14 (topic: voting behavior)

Assigned Reading:
No Internet essays assigned for Oct 21 or Oct 28

Week 10 (Nov 3-7): Issue Attitudes
Assigned Readings:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapters 8-10.
Benjamin I. Page and Lawrence R. Jacobs, Class War? What Americans Really Think about Economic Inequality (University of Chicago Press, 2009).
Pew Research Center, “For the Public, It’s Not about Class Warfare, But Fairness” (3/2/12); http://www.people-press.org/2012/03/02/for-the-public-its-not-about-class-warfare-but-fairness/
Internet essay #7 due Nov 4 (topic: polarization/realignment)

Week 11 (Nov 10-14): Civil Liberties, Terrorism, and War
Assigned Readings:
Bardes-Oldendick, Chapter 11.
Internet essay #8 due Nov 11 (topic: public opinion on domestic issues)
No class on Tuesday, Nov 11

Week 12 (Nov 17-21): Turnout and Participation
Assigned Readings:
Internet essay #9 due Nov 18 (topic: public opinion on international/defense issues)

Week 13 (Nov 24-28): Citizen Mistrust
Assigned Readings:


Internet essay #10 due Nov 25 (topic: turnout/participation)
No class on Thursday, Nov 27

Weeks 14-15 (Dec 1-5, 8-12): Campaigns/Political Communication

Assigned Readings:


Sides and Vavreck, The Gamble, review Chapter 7.


Internet essay #11 due Dec 2 (topic: citizen mistrust)

Dec 11: Final exam review, Internet essay #12 due (topic: campaigns/political communication)

Note: All Internet essays should represent original work by students (or, when the work of others is referenced, provide proper citations). To ensure that this is the case, essays must be submitted to an online plagiarism service called turnitin.com. Here is how it works:

The first step is that you need to create a student profile:
1. go to www.turnitin.com
2. click on create user profile
3. fill in your personal email address
4. fill in your personal password
5. type of user: choose student
6. enter class ID (8230355) and password (vote)
7. follow instructions

To log in after creating profile:
1. enter your personal email and password in the box on the upper right hand corner of the home page www.turnitin.com
2. click on POS 3204
3. from there you can submit your paper, just like adding an attachment to an email

Each essay has its own assignment folder. The procedure that you should follow is to (1) give a hard copy of their essay to me during class on the dates specified above, and (2) submit an electronic copy to turnitin.com at some point on the same day. Any assignment that is turned in late (without approval of the instructor) will be docked one letter grade per day. Any assignment that does not constitute original work by the author will be subject to penalties consistent with the UF Code of Student Conduct.